

Intersections: Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, White Christian Supremacy, and A Path Forward

A Senior Honors Thesis

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I. ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that White Christian Supremacy is a harmful ideology that is pervasive within the anti-trafficking movement and is used as justification to criminalize Black girls who are victims of domestic minor sex trafficking. I explain the racist history of the anti-trafficking movement and how those ideas persist in the movement today. I explain current interventions for victims of domestic minor sex trafficking, including Safe Harbor specialized dockets and diversion programs, as well as programs run through non-profit organizations. I argue that organizations operating out of White Christian Supremacy ideology are perpetuating harm and argue in favor of harm-reduction approaches.

II. INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues that the anti-trafficking movement is rooted in White Christian Supremacy, and those roots still impact our current systems for fighting sex trafficking in central Ohio. White Christian Supremacy is a term that I use to refer to the ideology that positions white Christians as morally superior and more deserving of services when in need than other populations. It is the intersection of white supremacy, white saviorism, and Christian superiority. The current anti-trafficking movement was heavily influenced by the abolitionist movement and the call to end chattel slavery, as well as the social purity movement (Parreñas, Hwang, & Lee, 2012). The social purity movement at the turn of the 20th Century was dedicated to abolishing prostitution and other sexual practices that were deemed immoral by the Christian church and people in power. Prior to this movement, prostitutes were seen as “fallen women” with loose sexual morals who

were threats to society. Being a prostitute was seen as a personal moral failure. However, the social purity movement expected women to cultivate their sexual purity and domesticity. They were called to restrain themselves sexually as an expression of purity (Zimmerman & Estabrook, 2021). The social purity movement reframed prostitution as being caused by poverty, marital deprivation, and abuse because sexual purity was viewed as an innate trait in white women (Liggins, 2003).

Out of this reframing, the idea of “white slavery” was born. White slavery refers to the prostitution and trafficking of white women, and the white slavery narrative replaced that of the enslaved African Americans (Liggins, 2003). The re-appropriation of the abolitionist movement was intentional because they were drawing an analogy between chattel slavery and human trafficking. In essence, what these new abolitionists were saying was that violating a white woman’s sexual purity effectively turned them into slaves and turning them into slaves was a violation of their status as white citizens (Parreñas, Hwang, & Lee, 201). White slavery was viewed as morally worse than the actual enslavement of African Americans (Zimmerman & Estabrook, 2021). This is why human trafficking is often referred to as “modern-day slavery”, and that language and reframing is deeply problematic (Parreñas, Hwang, & Lee, 201).

As a result of this idea of white slavery, the Mann Act of 1910 was passed. The Mann Act is largely considered by legislators the first anti-trafficking legislature to be passed, and it made it illegal to transport a white woman for the purpose of prostitution (Gross & Thomas, 2017). This law was often used as a way to punish Black men for having an interracial relationship with white women because an interracial relationship was seen as a violation of the white woman’s purity (Zimmerman & Estabrook, 2021). In response to

the Mann Act, white protestant women created rescue homes for women rescued from predatory men, and that is where white Christian saviorism first emerged in the antitrafficking movement (Gross & Thomas, 2017). While the laws eventually expanded to include all women and not just white women, in this thesis I argue that there is still racism in the anti-trafficking movement and the judicial system.

In this thesis, I show that messages from the social purity movement remain in antitrafficking organizations today. White slavery had a narrow conceptualization of victimhood, which erased Black sexual suffering and viewed Black women as deliberate transgressors. Black women today are more commonly seen as criminals instead of victims because sexual purity is not often associated with them in the same way that it is associated with white women (Zimmerman & Estabrook, 2021). The consequences are especially severe for transgender and gender non-conforming people of color (Carpenter & Marshall, 2017). Transgender women of color frequently report that police officers profile them as sex workers based solely on their appearance and over-interpret evidence like carrying condoms in order to prove their profile (Carpenter & Marshall, 2017; Zimmerman & Estabrook, 2021). In these ways and more, police officers use prostitution as a pretext to criminalize Black girls and women.

One of the important laws that has come out of the social purity movement and the Mann Act is The Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000. The TVPA was a landmark act that laid the groundwork for all subsequent legislature in response to human trafficking. One of the most significant accomplishments of this act was that it declared that any minor engaged in prostitution should be considered a victim of sex trafficking. Domestic minor sex trafficking (DMST) is a pervasive problem in the United

States. Because DMST is a largely underground and under-reported crime, it is hard to know just how pervasive the problem is. However, some sources indicate that up to 35% of prostitution-related arrests are minors and that at least 1 in 6 runaways could be considered victims of human trafficking (NHTRC, 2015)

This thesis examines vulnerabilities and risk factors for domestic minor sex trafficking and how those risk factors intersect with the ideology of White Christian Supremacy to criminalize Black girls. I then discuss Safe Harbor laws and interventions for DMST and explain why they are currently failing to help DMST victims in the way that they were designed to do. Ohio is a hub for human trafficking of all forms, and Central Ohio in particular is a hub for the sex trafficking of both minors and adults. I draw on specific organizations in Central Ohio to explain the prostitution and sex trafficking scene in Columbus, as well as how DMST intersects with and is distinct from the sex trafficking of adults and sex work. Finally, I highlight a few organizations in Central Ohio that are challenging the harmful effects of White Christian Supremacy within the anti-trafficking movement through their harm-reduction models.

I. Risk Factors

The majority of victims of DMST are runaways, which means that one of the major risk factors for DMST is child welfare system involvement, as well as a history of homelessness, and childhood abuse or neglect (Bounds & Delaney, 2015). Often, children living in high crime areas who are also enduring abuse in the home are most at risk for becoming DMST victims because running away is viewed as the best option in order to survive the circumstances they are facing at home (Barnert et al., 2016). Another major risk factor for a teen, especially in addition to some of the other vulnerabilities listed, is

identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community (Bounds & Delaney, 2015). If a teen is not accepted for their sexual orientation or gender identity, they may be kicked out of their home and forced into homelessness, or they may choose to run away in hopes of safety and acceptance. The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased family violence, and that has caused an increase in the rates of runaways (Todres, 2021). Once on the streets, the teen may be forced to engage in survival sex. Survival sex is a form of prostitution in which a person exchanges sexual favors for money, shelter, or anything else to meet their basic needs (Chohaney, 2016). Any minor engaging in survival sex is considered a victim of sex trafficking under the TVPA and under Ohio Law. While a minor engaging in survival sex would be considered self-trafficking, it can also serve as a gateway for involvement with a pimp (Chohaney, 2016).

Perhaps the biggest risk of all for DMST is being a racial minority, and more specifically, a Black girl. According to an FBI report (2017), 53% of juveniles arrested for prostitution were Black. Moreover, in a two-year study done by the Department of Justice (2011) between the years of 2008 and 2010, they found that out of all suspected cases of human trafficking in the United States, 40% of the suspected victims were Black. These statistics point to two separate areas of systemic racism. The first concern is that Black girls are more likely than their white counterparts to experience the risk factors for DMST, especially the ones related to living in poverty and high-crime neighborhoods. The second concern is that Black girls who are experiencing DMST are more likely to be arrested on prostitution charges than any other race, which highlights racial bias in law enforcement and judicial systems.

Part of the reason why Black girls are criminalized for prostitution-related offenses goes back to White Christian Supremacy and the social purity movement. Because purity only applied to white women, today Black girls are perceived as being more adult-like, a process known as adultification (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). Adultification also means that Black girls to be viewed as less innocent and feminine than their white peers, and that may contribute to Black girls receiving harsher penalties. A 2017 study (Epstein, Blake, & González) found that compared to white girls of the same age, survey participants perceived that Black girls need less nurturing, less protection, to be comforted and supported less, and that they are more independent and know more about adult topics, such as sex. Not only do these assumptions lead to Black girls being criminalized more often, they also serve as a risk factor for Black girls becoming victims of DMST. Along with being perceived as more adult-like, Black girls are also generally perceived by a predominantly white public and criminal justice system as biologically older than they are, which means that Black DMST victims are less likely to be identified as victims because their traffickers and law enforcement are less likely to recognize them as minors.

The adultification of Black girls creates an indistinction between childhood and adulthood. Adultification robs Black girls of their childhood and forces them to grow up and act like adults while they are still children. Often, Black girls internalize this adultification and view themselves as more adult than they are and more deserving of harsher punishments (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). The cycle of exploitation for Black girls often starts when they are young girls and persists into their adulthood because they were not offered the help that they needed when they were younger.

The issue of DMST simply cannot be discussed without talking about its intersection with substance use and misuse. The vast majority of DMST victims, whether self-trafficked or otherwise, struggle with some type of substance use disorder (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). Some youth may first become a victim of DMST by trafficking themselves in exchange for drugs. Others may become a victim of DMST before using, but ultimately addiction aids in keeping them in the cycle of trafficking. Many youth experiencing DMST are addicted to heroin or other opiates, which means that opioid crisis also heavily intersects with human trafficking (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). The intersection can also make it difficult to identify victims of DMST because they are often brought in on drug charges and not on prostitution-related charges.

II. Safe Harbor Interventions

In response to the TVPA, many states have passed Safe Harbor laws and implemented diversion programs in order to help keep trafficking victims out of the juvenile justice system (Bounds & Delaney, 2015). For a DMST victim, the juvenile justice system is a major source of re-traumatization (Barnert et al., 2016). In general, there are three different approaches that states have taken to Safe Harbor laws. Some states have chosen a decriminalization-only approach. Decriminalizing juvenile prostitution protects minors from being prosecuted for prostitution or prostitution-related charges, but it does not necessarily provide a pathway for minors to get the help that they need in order to end their exploitation (Barnert et al., 2016). Therefore, there is a danger in instituting a policy around decriminalization without creating a program for diversion because the youth will most likely continue to be exploited. Other states have taken a diversion-only approach. In these states, juvenile prostitution is still considered illegal.

However, instead of sending youth experiencing DMST into the juvenile justice system, they are instead referred to a diversion program. If the youth fail to complete the diversion program, they will be sent back into the juvenile justice system and can be prosecuted (Barnert et al., 2016). The final approach to Safe Harbor laws is a hybrid of the first two approaches that combines decriminalization and diversion. The hybrid approach attempts to address some of the gaps that the other two approaches leave, though whether it successfully does so is unclear (Barnert et al., 2016). All three of these approaches, while imperfect, are significant because they allow for DMST victims to be treated as vulnerable children in need of services instead of as criminals that need to be punished for wrongdoing (Barnert et al., 2016).

Ohio is a hub for human trafficking – both domestic and international – in part because of its strategic location as an interstate transportation node (Chohaney, 2016). Ohio's Safe Harbor law falls under the hybrid category that combines decriminalization and diversion. According to the Supreme Court of Ohio (2017), the Safe Harbor law is designed to ensure that minors are not charged with prostitution and creates a pathway to diversion programs. Until recently, Ohio's Safe Harbor law forbade charging youth under the age of sixteen with prostitution. Because sixteen is the legal age of consent in Ohio, Ohio law determined that sixteen and seventeen-year-olds may be considered trafficking victims, but only if coercion and lack of autonomy was suspected (Luminais, Lovell, & McGuire, 2019). However, Ohio House Bill 431, which was passed on December 22, 2020 and went into effect on April 12, 2021, expanded the existing Safe Harbor law to include decriminalization of prostitution for sixteen and seventeen-year-olds (Ohio Legislature, 2021).

Franklin County is one of the few counties in Ohio that has a specialized docket specifically created for DMST victims. That specialized docket is called Empowerment Court. Empowerment Court was first introduced in 2012 by Magistrate Lorenzo Sanchez in response to Judge Paul Herbert's specialized docket in Franklin County for adults, Changing Actions to Change Habits [CATCH] Court (Franklin County Juvenile Court). In order for a juvenile to be referred into Empowerment Court, they must be identified by law enforcement, Franklin County Children's Services, or some other court-involved professional as a potential victim of human trafficking. Once a potential victim is referred to Empowerment Court, the Court will decide if the juvenile is eligible for the program based on their own assessment. The Court rarely turns away a referral, but one of the major reasons for rejecting a referral would be if the juvenile has additional charges that are unrelated to their exploitation. There is a significant amount of ambiguity surrounding what constitutes an "unrelated" charge, which means that determining what qualifies as an unrelated charge is quite subjective and dependent on the person conducting the assessment (Franklin County Juvenile Court, 2012).

As a part of House Bill 431 (2020), the juvenile court is required to appoint a guardian ad litem for any juvenile who is brought in on prostitution-related charges or is a suspected victim of human trafficking in some other way. The guardian ad litem must not be the juvenile's attorney, and their role is to advocate for the best interest of the juvenile in conjunction with the attorney (Ohio Legislature, 2021). Victims of DMST often lack strong familial support, so guardians ad litem play a vital role in supporting the exploited youth.

In general, specialized dockets for human trafficking are easier to implement and more successful with adults than with juveniles (Miner-Romanoff, 2015). One of the major reasons for this is that specialized dockets for adults offer victims more agency and personal accountability. As minors, the juveniles who are suspected DMST victims do not get a choice in what their rehabilitation looks like. How successful they are in completing the diversion program is highly dependent on the quality of involvement from the guardian ad litem and others supporting the youth through the specialized docket (Miner-Romanoff, 2015). For both juveniles and adults, a specialized docket can only be successful if it addresses and meets the need that caused the person to become a victim of human trafficking in the first place. A need for food, housing, clothing, drugs, love, or a combination of any of the above will override the fear of being punished for prostitution (Miner-Romanoff, 2015).

Franklin County has had an estimated population of 1.292 million, where 51.3% is female, 61.3% white, 22.5% black, and 15.2% other. The data that I am going to share is for adults, but the theme is also true for juveniles. From the years 2012-2017, there were 7,184 prostitution-related arrests. Of those arrest, 74% were white, 22% were black, and 4% were another race. Out of those 7,184 arrests, 4% were referred to CATCH Court. Of the 4% that were referred, 67% were accepted. Of the 67% that were referred and accepted, 90% were white and 10% were black (Zimmerman & Estabrook, 2021). What that means is that referrals to CATCH Court do not reflect the demographics of individuals with prostitution-related arrests accurately. There are higher referrals and acceptances for white persons that are represented in the defendants' pool, and there are

lower referrals and acceptances for black persons than are represented in the defendants' pool.

One of the biggest concerns with Safe Harbor diversion programs and specialized dockets is that it is difficult to identify DMST victims to refer to those programs. There are many reasons why it can be hard to identify victims, but one of the major reasons is that DMST victims often do not view themselves as victims (Bounds & Delaney, 2015). Traffickers work to instill a false sense of agency in their victims, which often means that victims truly believe that they were choosing to engage in prostitution on their own volition, despite the fact that they were lacking choice and the freedom to leave (Perkins & Ruiz, 2017). Additionally, law enforcement and court-involved persons tasked with identifying victims are influenced by social messages around sexuality. Many people have an idealized view of what human trafficking victims look like that is influenced by White Christian Supremacy and the social purity movement. They picture white girls from loving middle-class homes who have not done anything wrong because those are the types of victims that the media portrays. In reality, DMST victims rarely present as that ideal victim that is heavily associated with white virginity (McGuire, 2018). As a result, DMST victims who are viewed as more problematic then become victims to the assumptions made by law enforcement and prosecutors, usually based on race, sexuality, gender identity, or socioeconomic status. In other words, there is a constant tension between the need to identify victims and the desire for victims to be less problematic (Luminais, Lovell, & McGuire, 2019).

The adultification of Black girls plays a major role in overlooking Black DMST victims. There is a culture of victim-blaming that stereotypes Black girls and other girls

of color as hypersexual and promiscuous (Bounds & Delaney, 2015). Additionally, because of adultification, Black DMST victims are less likely to identify as a victim than white victims. One of the most significant reasons for this is that victimhood has socially never been associated with Black girls. Black girls have not been allowed to be victims and are instead viewed as complicit and culpable in their own exploitation. Not only are they criminalized by law enforcement, but they are also criminalized by themselves.

Safe Harbor laws and diversion programs exist as ways to keep DMST victims out of the juvenile justice system. However, these laws and programs are failing to accomplish that goal. Regardless of Safe Harbor laws in place, DMST victims still make their way into the juvenile justice system because it is often thought of as the best option to keep the youth safe (Barnert et al., 2016). Moreover, many juveniles who enter into specialized dockets for diversion fail to successfully complete them (Luminais, Lovell, & McGuire, 2019). If the juveniles fail to complete their diversion program, they are most often sent back into the juvenile justice system and will be adjudicated on the charges that they initially incurred. Also, unfortunately, even juveniles who successfully complete the program often end up back in the sex trade. The specialized dockets were designed to reduce recidivism and increase well-being, but they are failing to do either of those things because they are not providing comprehensive-enough services. s

Specialized dockets for juveniles attempt to view the juveniles in their programs as both victims and delinquents simultaneously, and that creates a lot of tension.

Ultimately, it conveys a false sense of agency in the DMST victims because they are being told that they are victims and need to regain their agency, but they do not actually have the agency to choose how they want to engage the program. These specialized

dockets are meant to empower girls to exit the sex trade, but without resources, they are unable to make that choice (Luminais, Lovell, & McGuire, 2019).

One of the barriers to helping victims is that the court systems are concerned that the girls could act as recruiters if they are placed with other girls. A recruiter in terms of DMST is a victim who aligns themselves with their trafficker and follows instructions to convince other girls to join. This is a valid concern, and it's possible that the girls who are brought in on prostitution-related charges could act as recruiters. However, recruiting is a trauma response, and it is not the job of the exploited youth to ensure that recruiting does not happen. It is the job of the court, and that requires resources that specialized dockets do not currently have (Luminais, Lovell, & McGuire, 2017). Additionally, if a juvenile successfully completes a program of a specialized docket and then ends up in the sex trade again despite intervention, if they get arrested again, should they be prosecuted? If they were ideal victims, they would not re-offend, but they are not ideal victims, and re-offending is a real possibility. If a victim goes back to the sex trade, who failed: the DMST victim or the diversion program? The reality is that the specialized dockets designed to help keep DMST victims out of the sex trade are under-funded and simply cannot provide all of the resources necessary in order to keep victims from going back into the sex trade (Mir, 2013).

In order to treat DMST comprehensively, the first issue that needs to be addressed is substance use. Given that the vast majority of DMST victims suffer from some type of substance use disorder, no diversion program that does not include treatment for substance use will be able to effectively address the needs of the victims. It is incredibly important that the providers working with DMST victims are trauma-informed and have

special training in trauma because every DMST victim is a survivor of some type of trauma (McGuire, 2018). Also, a large number of youth who end up becoming DMST victims identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, and comprehensive care needs to include validating those identities. Often, sexual and gender identities are considered barriers to treatment as opposed to important factors to incorporate into the therapeutic process, and that approach is harmful to the LGBTQ-identifying juveniles (Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force, 2017). DMST victims always face a lack of social support, and part of that lack of support may stem from their sexual orientation or gender identity. Regardless of what factors are contributing to the lack of support for each individual victim, establishing a new support network is imperative in treating DMST victims. The support network also needs to extend beyond the care that they are receiving as part of the diversion program because they will lose that support when they complete the program. If the youth lose the support network that they had keeping them safe and accountable, then that will leave them vulnerable to entering back into the sex trade.

One of the most significant factors that keeps DMST victims from fully engaging the program and accepting the help being offered to them is trauma bonding. The attachment that the victim has to the trafficker can sometimes be a barrier to treatment because it can make the victim unwilling to cooperate (Mir, 2013). That attachment is called a trauma bond, and those bonds are intentionally created by abusers in order to control their victims and manipulate their emotions. DMST victims who are trauma bonded to their trafficker may be incredibly protective of the trafficker and lie to keep the trafficker from facing legal repercussions (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2021). Resolving these trauma bonds is crucial to DMST victims' recovery process, but it is challenging to

do. In order to survive the abuse that they were facing, many DMST victims learn to disconnect from other people to lessen the threat of vulnerability. Therefore, providers working with DMST victims need to help them foster new and healthy connections apart from their traffickers (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2021). Fostering new connections that meet the emotional needs that the trafficker once held is the only way to break the trauma bond, and breaking the trauma bond helps to ensure that the victims do not go back to their traffickers.

III. White Christian Supremacy in Central Ohio Organizations

White Christian Supremacy in the anti-trafficking movement and the idea of white slavery has not only impacted the justice system, but it has also heavily influenced anti-trafficking organizations in Central Ohio. There are over twenty anti-trafficking organizations in Central Ohio, and the vast majority of them are connected to Christian churches or other Christian ministries. These Christian ministries masquerade as helpful anti-trafficking organizations, but the reality is that they lack the skills, knowledge, and credentials to do the work of restorative justice that they claim to do.

Out of the many anti-trafficking organizations in Central Ohio, there is only one that is specifically dedicated to helping DMST victims. That organization is owned by Central Ohio Youth for Christ and operates the only residential treatment facility for DMST victims in Ohio. While they will take in any minor who has been sexually exploited regardless of their varying identities, it is a faith-based nonprofit that explicitly believes and states that homosexuality is a sin. Given that many, if not most, DMST victims identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, this organization is not a safe place for them to be fully themselves without fear of judgment or condemnation.

A major red flag that may indicate that an organization is operating out of an ideology of White Christian Supremacy is when care is being provided by people who are not licensed to provide such care. People who are not trained to provide trauma-informed care, such as licensed therapists, should not and cannot provide trauma-informed care (McGuire, 2018). However, many Christian organizations claim that their unlicensed staff members are providing trauma-informed care. The phrase “trauma-informed” has become somewhat of a buzzword, but it should not be. DMST victims are deserving of care that is truly trauma-informed, comprehensive, and affirming of all of their identities.

For a DMST victim, one of the most important parts of treatment is establishing a sense of agency and control (Mir, 2013). The survivor needs to learn that they have agency and are capable of being self-sufficient and taking care of themselves apart from their trafficker. This is a crucial part of breaking the cycle of trafficking. In treatment programs that are explicitly Christian, this is harder to accomplish because the survivor is also told that their recovery is dependent on a relationship with God. Instead of promoting agency, they promote the idea that God gives them what they need. For a survivor that identifies as a Christian, that ideology may be a comforting statement and orientation to treatment. However, to a survivor that does not identify as a Christian, that sends the message that they are incapable of finding healing on their own, and that is dangerous and damaging. Distinguishing between victims of sex trafficking and sex workers can be difficult because many victims of sex trafficking believe that they are acting out of full agency, but the distinction is nevertheless important.

This particular organization also explicitly states that they believe all prostitution is exploitation, regardless of if the sex work is voluntary and regardless of age. In other

words, they do not believe that it is possible for adults to engage in prostitution as sex work in a way that is not inherently exploitative. That is a dangerous position to take because it blurs the lines between sex work and sex trafficking, and those are not the same thing. Sex work, by definition, is not forced or coerced (Albright & D'Adamo, 2017). Both sex work and sex trafficking fall under the broad umbrella of the sex trade, but sex workers are not victims of sex trafficking, and victims of sex trafficking are not sex workers. This distinction is vitally important because both sex workers and victims of sex trafficking would benefit from the decriminalization of prostitution, but conflating the two harms them both. Sex workers deserve to have their work be accepted as valid labor, and victims of sex trafficking deserve freedom.

Other Christian anti-trafficking organizations in Central Ohio also conflate sex work and sex trafficking in their activism. These organizations conflate the two because of their White Christian Supremacy ideology. They believe that purity is innate to white women, and so any white woman engaging in prostitution must be coerced into doing so. On the other hand, they believe that Black women should strive to purity like white women. Conflating sex work and sex trafficking serves to continue viewing white girls and women as victims and Black girls and women as criminals. Many of these Christian organizations not only operate out of this harmful ideology, but then in addition, they also fail to provide practical help. There is an organization that goes around the streets of Columbus and hands out roses with notes of encouragement and Bible verses to the women on the streets. If they believe that those women are not acting out of their own agency and are actually victims of sex trafficking, then that is not practical help. It is performative activism because it makes the people handing out the roses feel good about

themselves for taking action, but it does nothing to serve the population that they are claiming to help. Not only is performative activism entirely unhelpful, but it teaches the women on the streets that they cannot trust activists because they do not provide real help. Christian organizations that perform activism in that way hinder the good work of other organizations because the women become distrustful of people offering them help. Additionally, roses are associated with femininity and purity, so the fact that they are choosing to hand out roses specifically shows that the activism is rooted in the ideologies that came out of the social purity movement.

Organizations operating out of White Christian Supremacy believe that it is their job to save people, and that they are holding truth that women caught in prostitution are lacking. Not only is that idea damaging to women caught in prostitution and human trafficking (as well as survivors coming out of it), but it is also damaging to the antitrafficking movement as a whole and adds to the burden of the organizations that are operating out of different ideologies and helping in more practical ways. Victims of human trafficking should not be treated like projects, and that is what many of these organizations are doing. These organizations often want to work with trafficking victims that look like the pure and ideal victim associated with the idea of white slavery that came out of the social purity movement. They want to save the white women who were forced into trafficking against their will with no addictions, no mental illness, no problematic behavioral concerns, and no way out without their help. Those characteristics just simply do not describe the population of trafficking victims. Nearly all women caught in the cycles of prostitution are dealing with a substance use disorder, and that

should not disqualify them from help. They are deserving of the exact same care that would be given to the fictitious ideal victim.

IV. Harm Reduction and Anti-Racism

The conflation of sex work and sex trafficking is harmful, and so is the indistinction between girls and women, especially for Black girls. When talking about organizations that exist to serve women engaging about prostitution, I want to be mindful of the adultification of Black girls and how that translates to the work that these organizations are doing. Many of the women that these organizations work with started being exploited as teenagers, and that cycle of exploitation carried over into their adult lives. Because their exploitation started as minors and they were robbed of their childhood, it is virtually impossible to disentangle the issues of DMST and the sex trafficking of adult women. Therefore, even anti-trafficking organizations that specifically cater to adults are important in fighting against DMST.

Fortunately, in addition to the organizations operating out of a White Christian Supremacy ideology, there are a handful of organizations in Central Ohio that are working to actively challenge that. These organizations are: She Has A Name, Freedom a la Cart, Advocating Opportunity, OneVOICE4Freedom, and Sanctuary Night.

She Has A Name is a Columbus non-profit founded on the premise that survivors of human trafficking are human beings worthy of being treated with dignity (She Has A Name, n.d). She Has A Name fights human trafficking through education, advocacy, and care. Education is the largest part of what She Has A Name does, and they are less involved in practically supporting victims and survivors than some of the other organizations. She Has A Name educated the general public about human trafficking by

holding quarterly classes on the basics of human trafficking. In addition to education, She Has A Name partners with many other organizations to help with resourcing. They also host support groups for survivors of human trafficking and for former solicitors. The education that She Has A Name provides is important for the community in Central Ohio, and the fact that they do so much education takes the burden of educating off of other organizations and allows them to focus on directly meeting the needs of women and girls caught in prostitution and sex trafficking.

Freedom a la Cart is an organization that provides employment to survivors of sex trafficking as they build new lives and learn to become self-sufficient. They provide women with practical job skills and help them to develop a strong work ethic, which ultimately helps pave them a pathway to freedom. Freedom a la Cart partners with CATCH Court, so survivors who enter into CATCH are offered positions working with Freedom as part of their program. In addition to employment, Freedom offers many other services to assist survivors, some of which include independent living assistance, life skills workshops, support group meetings, education assistance, tattoo removal, and crisis assistance (Freedom a la Cart, n.d). Freedom's ultimate goal is to create a safe place of restoration where survivors can heal, learn, and prepare for their futures as they reintegrate into the community. The work that Freedom is doing is so important for survivors because it helps them to establish a sense of control and agency over their own lives. Freedom gives survivors of sex trafficking hope for their futures, and that is crucial to the healing process.

Advocating Opportunity (AO) is a unique non-profit organization that provides legal services to victims of sex and labor trafficking. They are one of the only

organizations in the country that provides comprehensive, holistic, trauma-informed legal and support services to people who have experienced human trafficking. To every client, AO provides an attorney and a client advocate, and they are the only non-profit legal services organization whose entire staff is certified in trauma-responsive care. The approach that AO uses in working with clients is rights-based and client-led, which means that respecting the individual autonomy of the client is a high priority. AO works with local courts, social service agencies, law enforcement, and other organizations dedicated to supporting trafficked persons. More specifically, AO assists victims of trafficking in: understanding the legal system and their rights in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner, understanding the criminal and civil legal processes and their roles – including as a victim, witness, or defendant, learning to work with and understand the courts, law enforcement, governmental agencies, and nongovernmental organizations in a new context, accessing immigration relief and assistance, and pursuing civil remedies (Advocating Opportunity, n.d). Advocating Opportunity is unique in the work that they are doing, and they provide the comprehensive care that survivors need to feel safe and understood. The staff at AO works hard to educate other court-involved people about human trafficking and the laws surrounding it. AO is based in Toledo, OH, but they also have an office in Columbus and work with counties across Ohio to advocate for trafficked persons.

OneVOICE4Freedom in Columbus, OH is run by its founder, Nicole Braddock Bromley and helps victims of human trafficking by distributing “freedom bags”. Freedom bags are backpacks full of hygiene products, nonperishables, and resource cards to victims working on the streets and to those coming off the streets. They also serve hot

meals and build relationships with homeless youth and runaways. Building those relationships with at-risk youth is critical in attempting to keep them from becoming DMST victims. In safe houses for survivors, OneVOICE4Freedom hosts “pampering parties” to help make the survivors feel loved, cared for, and supported on their journeys recovering from trafficking and substance use. Finally, OneVOICE4Freedom educated the general public about human trafficking through presentations and educational programming (OneVOICE4Freedom, n.d). OneVOICE4Freedom operates with a goal of harm-reduction, which is necessary in supporting women and girls who have experienced sex trafficking.

Lastly, Sanctuary Night is a non-profit specifically on the West side of Columbus that runs a drop-in center for women caught in the cycles of prostitution. Its executive director, Hannah Estabrook, LPCC-S, is the former coordinator of CATCH Court. While their operations are currently limited, their vision is to fundraise for a 24/7 drop-in center to care for sex workers and victims of sex trafficking. Sanctuary Night provides basic necessities such as clothes, coats, gloves, hats, hand and foot warmers, blankets, and any other practical needs that these women may have (Sanctuary Night, n.d). The women who come through Sanctuary Night are not required to identify themselves in any way which fosters a sense of trust between the women and Estabrook. Sanctuary Night is unique among anti-trafficking organizations because they are providing consistent, harm reduction care to women who are still actively engaged in prostitution and human trafficking. Sanctuary Night is also strategically placed on Sullivant Avenue in Franklinton, OH. Sullivant Avenue is the number one hotspot for prostitution in Columbus. Of the 1,880 prostitution arrests in Columbus between the year of 2017 and

July of 2019, more than half were on Sullivan or right nearby (Zachariah et al., 2019). In 2019, the Columbus Dispatch published a three-part series titled “Suffering on Sullivan.” Shortly after, Estabrook said that her mission is to turn “Suffering on Sullivan” into “Sanctuary on Sullivan” (Zachariah, 2019).

Since the victims of sex trafficking who come through Sanctuary Night are still actively being exploited, that means that they are still very much trauma bonded to their trafficker. The relationships that Estabrook builds with these women establishes a connection that is not to an abuser, and that is critically important to helping women exit the cycle of exploitation. If Estabrook can meet some of the needs for the women that traffickers are currently meeting, then that will lessen the intensity of the trauma bonds that these women have. When Sanctuary Night has the funding necessary to open the 24/7 drop-in center, that will revolutionize harm-reduction care for women on the streets and help women to break the cycle of exploitation without going through the court systems.

III. CONCLUSION

White Christian Supremacy is an ideology that impacts nearly every system of oppression and subsequent justice work, and the area of DMST is heavily impacted by it. White Christian Supremacy and the social purity movement contribute to the adultification of Black girls, which ultimately leads to the criminalization of Black girls. Black girls are particularly vulnerable to DMST because of adultification and because of the fact that White Christian Supremacy deems them unworthy of the same type of purity that is associated with white girls.

Safe Harbor laws and interventions were designed to help keep DMST victims out of the juvenile justice system. However, these diversion programs are failing. These interventions rely on law enforcement or other court-involved personnel to identify DMST victims, and often that means that Black DMST victims do not get identified because of adultification, and ultimately, they end up in the juvenile justice system anyway. Additionally, many juveniles who enter into diversion programs fail to complete them, which also means that they are likely to end up back in the juvenile justice system. Finally, there is very little evidence to support that these diversion programs decrease recidivism. It is common for juveniles who successfully complete diversion programs to eventually enter back into the sex trade. One of the main reasons for the high rate of recidivism is that nearly all DMST victims who are arrested suffer from some type of substance use disorder and the desire for drugs can outweigh the potential consequences of being involved in the sex trade.

Comprehensive services for DMST victims must include treatment for substance use disorders in order to be effective. Additionally, given that many DMST victims identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, comprehensive services should include treatment specific to their individual identities. Sexual orientation and gender identity should not be barriers to treatment.

Ohio is a hub for human trafficking, and Central Ohio has many anti-trafficking organizations as a result. Many of the organizations in Central Ohio are operating out of White Christian Supremacy ideology, which is an ideology that is causing more harm than doing good. White Christian Supremacy conflates sex work and sex trafficking, and

it aids in the indistinction between girlhood and womanhood. Blurring the boundaries between those concepts hurts sex workers and victims of sex trafficking, specifically for Black girls and women.

White Christian Supremacy is pervasive, which means that organizations that challenge that ideology are imperative to creating a path forward. Organizations in Central Ohio that are operating through a harm-reduction lens are disrupting the White Christian Supremacy narrative, which means that they are sex trafficking victims in a far more substantial way than other Christian organizations, but they have an increased burden on them to undo the harm that White Christian Supremacy is causing. My hope is that more organizations move away from White Christian Supremacy in favor of harm reduction.

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